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Why Not Abstain?

WHY NOT ABSTAIN?

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I AM asked to say something to Christian Endeavourers about their attitude to the Liquor Traffic, as one of the great outstanding evils of our time.

The first thing to be done, I think, is to try to realize the tremendous urgency of the appeal which comes to all who love Christ and fatherland to face the whole question resolutely in the Spirit and power of God. Nothing is more perplexing than the difficulty there is in getting the great mass even of Christian people to face the subject at all, and it is as certain as can be that nothing

very effective will be done until the Church in the land is thoroughly in earnest in the matter. Yet how any Christian or any patriot can be indifferent as things are just now is altogether beyond my comprehension.

For what are some of the facts of the case?

Lord Rosebery says, that unless the nation throttles the traffic, the traffic will throttle the nation.

Lord Peel, as the result of what he saw and heard as chairman of the Royal Commission, states that it is now a struggle for the mastery between the trade and the state.

The author of the notable book, "Wine on the Lees," says, as the result of what he saw in preparing for that book, that, unless there is a change for the better, nothing can save Britain from the fate of Tyre and Sidon.

And a man as wise and hopeful as Archdeacon Farrar, tells us that at times he has been forced to think that we have lost the turn of the tide—that the battle has been fought and lost.

But when I recall the past of our land, our Scottish martyrs and our English martyrs, and all the sacrifices which heroic men and women have made that we might be free and worthy of our freedom, and recall also the fact that God Almighty is not only in heaven but rules on the earth, I cannot but think that ere long the nation will awake from its stupor and rise to do battle with this monstrous evil which is sapping its life blood, and to cast off for ever this tyranny so corrupting and hateful.

It is for us who wish to hasten the coming of the Kingdom in our midst to let the facts everywhere be known.

It ought to be known that, as a nation, we

are spending nearly twelve times as much on strong drink as on education, and that even such a body as the British Association has said that probably only a fifth of what we so spend can be considered necessary.

It ought to be known, in these days of keen competition from abroad, that a director of a great shipbuilding yard on the Tyne says, that in one year 28 per cent. of the time of their workmen was lost through broken time caused by intemperance; and that if, as a nation, we drank on the United States scale, as much would be saved as would not only provide all that is needed for a national system of old age pensions, but would pay off the national debt in less than twenty-two years.

And it ought to be known that no money puts so little into the labour market as that which is invested in the trade in drink, as is brought out by the calculation that, whereas £14,000,000 sunk in Irish breweries and dis-

tilleries only provides employment for 3,000 persons, the same sum sunk in North of Ireland linen factories provides employment for 103,000 persons!

What shall we say, too, of the urgency of reform when we look round us and see the countless wrongs which the traffic is for ever inflicting on the helpless, the weak, and the young? We see lads who not so long ago were full of promise drifting out to the outer darkness of worthlessness and disgrace. We see homes which once were happy, and might have been happy yet, cursed with drunken mothers and wives, and blighted by drunken husbands and fathers. We see hungry, ill-clad children growing up amid profanity and vice, and multitudes of broken-hearted women and degraded men swept down the foul stream to the black sea of death. I appeal to you if I am exaggerating one whit. There are those here who could add many a tale of debt and devilry and disgrace to the sickening list.

"There is no crime to speak of at all in Scotland," says Colonel M'Hardy, chairman of the Scottish Prison Commission, "it is all a question of whisky."

"It remains terribly clear," says the Department of Industrial Statistics, in the latest report, "that we are further than ever from getting rid of the huge volume of drunkenness and disorder which mark Scottish statistics so unfavourably as compared with those of other countries."

If to all this we add the mischief and misery which drink is for ever bringing to those who never were drunk in their lives, but who let alcohol loosen their tongue, impair their self-control, tamper with their passions, and set cravings at work which send souls headlong to the pit, what a fearful accumulation of motives we have for being tremendously urgent in this matter, and for urging all others to be urgent too! And yet men, who are not bad men, go on

offering strong drink to those who should never taste it. The canons of etiquette, the dictates of social customs, the fear lest others should think them fanatical, or, worse still, mean, are allowed to outweigh the gravest and saddest facts, the dishonour of the nation, and the disgrace of the Church, for both alike are stained and degraded, baffled and beaten by the drink.

Our great work, then, is to put an end to the indifference which still prevails, and rouse both Church and nation to the gravity of the situation, and the urgent need there is for drastic and all-round reform. Let me mention four ways in which we can all do this.

First, *We can all be total abstainers.*

I lay down no hard or high doctrine on this matter. I neither say what we should do were we living on the other side of the moon or in an ideal state where drunkenness was altogether unknown. All I say is, that

as things are just now in Scotland, with drink-begotten ruin and misery meeting us on every hand, total abstinence is the very least those should practise who are called on to abstain from the very appearance of evil. That, in truth, is not much to ask in such a time of distress, since it is now beyond all doubt that strong drink is altogether unnecessary for those who are in ordinary health: and wherever it means much to give up its use, it ought to be given up at once. If only we could universalize total abstinence the problem would be solved, and while other forces must also be at work ere that consummation can be reached, every name added to the list of genuine abstainers is a step in the right direction. As for the talk which we still hear about those who refuse to give up their freedom, or of those who speak from the superior height of being able to take and able to leave it alone, I have no hesitation in describing it as so much cant. Surely the best way for any to show, in days like these, with

national decrepitude and disgrace in sight, unless a change takes place, that they can do without it—the only Christian way—is to do without it for the sake of the tempted and the weak. I suspect, however, that some who talk in that way would find it harder than they think to give it up, and it would be a great gain for many who refuse to abstain to say frankly that they use strong drink because they like it.

Second, *We can all see to it that we do nothing which may help to lead others astray.*

Modern society is very complex, and sometimes fine questions as to responsibility are raised, which are not easily answered; but all the same, there are broad lines of reverence and care for the young and the tempted, along which we must walk if we would be loyal either to duty or to common-sense. It is not enough to say that we shall never give strong drink to any one who ought not to get

it. Modern science has laid bare to us some of the hereditary forces which are at work. We know now that the drink crave may be lying dormant in many an unthought-of life, and what if we should apply the spark to the gunpowder, hand a soul over to the foe, or help to push even some one we love down to death? "Evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart," and want of thought may be very cruel and wicked.

This great foe has many subtle allies in the growing worry and hurry of modern life, and in the highly developed nervous temperament which is now so common. It is no paltry or ignoble longing to desire earnestly to be safe, when safety means not only a nobler manhood or a truer womanhood for ourselves, but freedom from the shame of having helped to lead others astray,—it may even be of having helped to lead those we love out into the fatal range. I confess that I cannot see how any one who longs for less is making any strenuous endeavour to live and work for Christ.

Third, *We can all do what we can to break up the conspiracy of silence which prevails in regard to this matter.*

That such a conspiracy exists is beyond doubt. Even when Government inquiries are made about accidents and disasters, the fact, so often apparent to all who have eyes to see, that drink was at the bottom of them, is seldom allowed to appear. And the same is true of many a sudden death, and many an untimely end. For the slimy trail of the unclean thing meets us everywhere, in peace and war, in business and trade, in home and church, in college and school. It cheats the wisest, beguiles the cleverest, and lays the strongest low.

It is for those who would make an end of the evil to tear the bandages from the self-blinded eyes and lay the ugly, cruel facts bare to those who cry peace and progress when there is dishonour and death. It is far from pleasant work, but it must be done if

the work of God is not to be submerged more and more in our land by the tide of indifference, and we must go forward to it in the name of the Lord.

Fourth, *We can all help to lift this question out of the rut of partisanship, and make it manifest as the foremost economic, moral, and social question of our time.*

I am a strong party man myself, but with all my heart I protest against a question like this being made to depend on the fortunes of any political party. Far from objecting to drink-sellers saying their trade is their politics, I think we ought to take a leaf out of their book, and say the national salvation is our politics, and that we shall help no man to power who will not support the movement for reform. This is no party question, it is a matter for all parties, for it is a matter of life and death both for the State and the Church.

As an economic question it demands the attention of chambers of commerce and trades societies of every sort, for no national wealth will long stand the present waste.

As a moral and social question it demands the attention of all who wish to banish cruelty and poverty and crime from our midst.

As a political question it demands the immediate attention of every statesman and patriot, of Imperialist and Little-Englander alike, for there is nothing so urgent as it is.

And as a religious question it demands the whole-hearted attention of the Church of the living God, for she alone can tell of One who can save to the uttermost, and of the motive power which alone can inspire and strengthen with all-conquering might those on whose hearts it has been or may yet be laid to set our land free from its disgrace and shame, and make this a holy nation, fearing God and having no other fear.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOUR:

ITS PRINCIPLES.

1. Personal devotion to our divine Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST.

2. The Covenant obligation embodied in the prayer-meeting pledge, without which there can be no true Society of Christian Endeavour.

3. Constant religious training for all kinds of service involved in the various Committees, which—so many of them as are needed—are equally with the prayer-meeting essential to a Society of Christian Endeavour.

4. Strenuous loyalty to the local Church and denomination with which each Society is connected.

5. We also reaffirm our increasing confidence in interdenominational spiritual fellowship, through which we hope, not for organic unity, but for the fulfilment of our Lord's prayer for spiritual unity—"*that they all may be one.*"

6. We also reaffirm what has been so often declared, that it is not the province of Christian Endeavour to legislate for the individual conscience.

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